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SIPDIS

NSC FOR MGA VIN, LELLIS
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

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SUBJECT: OFFICIAL: "SUDAN ON WRONG COURSE"

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES ROBERT E. WHITEHEAD, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B), (D)

¶1. (C) During a courtesy call October 27, newly appointed Director General for Protocol at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Haydar Hassan Haj Al Sidig, Director General for Protocol, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told Deputy Chief of Mission that he sees the new U.S. policy toward Sudan as positive. His view is that of a technocrat and a veteran diplomat, not a politician, he averred. "We need you; we need the United States," Hassan said. Sudan needs to reform and open up, a view shared by "a large number" of the diplomats working at the Ministry and of the people of Sudan. He has tried many times to persuade the ruling party that the country must transform. Sometimes they listen, but more often they do not, he said; they just do not care. Sudan is simply "on the wrong course". Had he been in charge, the bilateral relationship would have been better, he said.

¶2. (C) With regard to the new policy, he cautioned, "If you press Sudanese, they will never move." One must come at them smoothly, continue to talk and to persuade, repeating the same message, he counseled. The governing group is tribal he said, and this is the way of the tribes. (Note: President Bashir and Presidential Adviser Nafie ali Nafie are from the Ja'ali tribe, while Vice President Ali Osman Taha and Presidential Adviser for National Security Salah Ghosh are from the Shaigea tribe. End Note) Although a Shaigea himself, Hassan told DCM he was born and raised in the urban environment of Omdurman.

¶3. (C) Bio Note and Comment: During his 20 years in the diplomatic corps, Hassan served as Ambassador to Algeria and Central Africa. Hassan played professional soccer on the El Hilal national team, serving as Captain. His meteoric rise in the sport was likened to that of a Soviet cosmonaut, and earned him the nickname "Ali Gagarin", which he uses in his email address, and by which he is affectionately called by colleagues and friends. If he is telling the truth about speaking his mind to a regime notably intolerant of dissent, it may be his widespread popularity, word of which had reached us well before the meeting, that has allowed him not only to survive but to prosper despite his outspokenness.
WHITEHEAD